

# ON COURSE

**Vol 4**

**POEMS FROM THE PK SUMMER SCHOOL POETS 2025**



Edited by Jim Bennett

## CONTENTS

### SARAH BECKETT

Drinking with Akhmatova  
Dry your Tears  
Dad's Piano Seasons

### ION CORCOS

In my Practice of Acceptance  
An Unspoken Covenant  
A Gusty Pier on a Winter's Day

### KATHRYN DE LEON

God Was on Trial in 1971  
My Father's Bass  
Prediction      21 June 2020

### DIANA HILLS

Prayer for today  
The Covid Rainbows  
model Mona Lisa

### FRANCESCA HUNT

Maketh the Day, Maketh the Night  
Mocking  
Silence – the witch of perpetuity

### LAUREN JARVIS

Empty Nest Blues  
the great global rat crisis of 2025  
Hail Late April

### SARAH KENT

What Three Words at Church of St Andrew, Holborn  
Sainsbury's  
An Easter Monday Visit

### CORINNE LAWRENCE

Al  
Sehnsucht  
The Feathered Flame

### JOY LEBOF

To Be a Woman  
Where Wolves Run  
Mourning      (JZ2)

### MARTHA LANDMAN

Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall  
Photo Girl  
Pedestalled - Sir Samuel James Way

**ANNE McCREA**

Cairo USA

Judith Hearne is Alive and Well  
Reunion

**DAPHNE MILNE**

A Long Road  
On growing up  
Blue – Beyond Dreaming

**ANNE SHEPPARD**

We Walked in Golden Conversation  
Tomorrow I will Grieve for my Country  
The Seagull

**WENDY WEBB**

Accents on Gardening Duties  
White Silk, Red Hose, Grey Shade  
Grimm Vaudeville Plays Chicken and Lace

### **SARAH BECKETT**



Sarah Beckett lives in the West Indies. Her poetry has been published in anthologies in the USA, the UK, Australia and Trinidad, and recently her poem 'Stardust' won second prize in the Poetry Kit International Poetry Competition 2025. She has two books published; 'IERE Living in the Land of the Humming Bird' and 'I wrote my heart across an unknown sky Homage to Camus.'

#### **Poems**

Drinking with Akhmatova  
Dry your Tears  
Dad's Piano Seasons

### **Drinking with Akhmatova**

With you I drink to our undoing,  
to the monsters of deceit,  
to all those who trample  
truth beneath their feet,

toast treason and corruption  
say farewell to justice,  
ethics now a foreign language  
tyranny revived.

I raise my glass to you my dear,  
our loneliness together,  
our ruined life  
the dead's blank eyes, the fact  
God has not saved us.

Published Rough Diamond: 100 Poems for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Anthology 2025

### **Dry Your Tears**

Yes, I know  
the news is bad - but ;look  
there is beauty in this world,  
where the clouds lark about in fields of blue  
chasing each other across the sky;  
and a man and a woman entwine their arms,  
walk along the water's edge  
burnished black-gold in the morning sun.

Dry your tears,  
there is beauty here  
in the language of the unsaid,  
where the flame-trees flower  
and pelicans still cross the bay at twilight,  
unafraid of the approaching night  
host to a thousand astonished stars,  
and the sea, rocked in the moon's forgiving light.

Published The Stafford Challenge Anthology 2025

### Dad's Piano Seasons

In Spring when bluebells bloomed  
    blue as the floor of heaven,  
        you played Chopin's Etudes

and music unfurled  
    like a string of pearls  
        through an open window.

I reeled through summer  
    to the strains of jazz,  
        and rollicking Beiderbeck Rags,

poppies rocked on their stalks in the breeze  
    while I lay in the long grass  
        dizzy with sunlight and music.

Autumn swept in with red sunsets,  
    trees turned bronze,  
        you swigged your whisky in a golden room,

sang *Autumn Leaves* and *Cry me River*  
    while I sat in front of the fire  
        dreaming and roasting marshmallows.

On winter evenings I'd sit on the piano-stool  
    with you and watch the snow fall down  
        while we sang Little Town of Bethlehem .

## ION CORCOS



Ion Corcos was born in Sydney, Australia in 1969. He has been published in *Best of Australian Poems*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Westerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Southword*, and other journals. Ion is the author of *Spring Days* (Yavanika Press, 2025) & *A Spoon of Honey* (Flutter Press, 2018).

### **Poems**

In my Practice of Acceptance  
An Unspoken Covenant  
A Gusty Pier on a Winter's Day

### **In my Practice of Acceptance**

On the train, late out of the station,  
I take a seat, this time alone, until a man asks  
if he can sit on the seat beside me.  
Outside, fields, mountains, low mist.  
Yesterday, as I sat on a park bench,  
I heard a thump: a dead bird fallen  
from a tree; a magpie appeared,  
picked at its feathers, tossed them away,  
dragged the body towards another tree.  
As the train moves on, I gradually  
get used to the man sitting beside me.  
I imagined this day months ago,  
but I didn't include the rain that fell this morning,  
my aloneness, that I would practice  
acceptance. I did not know this, but the test  
began yesterday, as I waited for you.

First published in *Australian Poetry Journal*

### **An Unspoken Covenant**

A jackdaw lands on the edge of a roof,  
wipes snow from a walnut it has taken,  
taps the shell until it cracks apart.  
It glances at another bird passing above,

the sudden shift of snow on an awning.  
Steely beak picks at the nut, knocks *caw*  
into the air, leaving its meagre feast split,  
as it disappears over a karstic lake.

On the water, coots have less room to hide  
now that more reeds have been cut,  
and snow has pushed the rusted clumps over,  
unmelted ice keeping them down.  
In a room, a painting of Poseidon on a rock:  
outside the frame; illumination, a wall.

First published in *The Bombay Literary Magazine*

### **A Gusty Pier on a Winter's Day**

A flock of gulls rises from a choppy sea,  
hangs aloft in abeyance – a distraction,  
the outpouring of a cut, winter's anguish;  
in the confusion, disarrangement.

What is always present, just further –  
the background, the canvas – disappears,  
as if it never was. When it is overlooked,  
or overlayed, by gulls, for example,

the seen is always via a detour:  
it has already been; no more smooth stones,  
drifts of kelp on the shore;  
and so life becomes a flock of gulls.

Even when you shut your eyes, dream: gulls,  
gulls, gulls. As if there is nothing more to see,  
as if the journey has finished;  
yet it persists, always unfolding.

An opening, a way out: to see the flock depart,  
and at the same time, the unending sea.

First published in *Clerestory*

### **KATHRYN DE LEON**



Kathryn de Leon is from Los Angeles, California but has been living in England for fifteen years. She is a teacher and lived in Japan for six years teaching English to Japanese university students. Her poems have appeared in several magazines in the US including *Calliope*, *Aaduna*, and *Black Fox*, in Mexico *The Ofi Press*, and in the UK, *London Grip*, *Amethyst Review*, *New Critique*, and *The High Window* where she was the Featured American Poet.

#### **Poems**

God Was on Trial in 1971  
My Father's Bass  
Prediction      21 June 2020

### **God Was on Trial in 1971**

I cut school to visit the Manson girls  
on a Los Angeles sidewalk outside the court  
where their god was on trial.

Squeaky Fromme shouted “You can do it!”  
as I trudged up the steep street towards the girls.  
I joined them on the ground, sat seiza,  
hands palm up in my lap for hours,  
high on the stark beauty of their shaved heads  
grouped like pale planets in orbit  
around the wide eyes of an awestruck  
fifteen-year-old girl.

They had X-ed themselves out of society,  
carved the proof between their eyes.  
I wanted to carve my forehead.  
I wore my bloody X on the inside.

I kept a matchstick one of the girls  
dropped in the street.

Published in *Triggerfish Critical Review*, Issue 33

### **My Father's Bass**

It was always in the corner of the family room,  
a tall, voluptuous figure of shiny brown  
topped with the curled tail of a seahorse,  
leaning lazily against the wall,  
cocky and familiar as a family member,  
patiently waiting for my father's hands  
to pull it into his arms.

The two of them stood side by side like brothers,  
twins joined together  
for jazz and big band music practice.

Sometimes my father coaxed me  
small and timid into the living room  
as smoky and bright as a spotlit stage,  
guitars and lap steel guitar joining the bass,  
his musician friends seated, smiling at me.

A quiet man, my father let the bass's deep voice  
speak for him, the notes thumping  
like an adrenaline-fuelled heartbeat,  
his brown fingers thick and full of jazz  
as they moved agilely along the strings  
like a sculptor's hands working in clay,  
creating invisible masterpieces that hung on the air  
of those safe childhood evenings.

I hear my father when I hear jazz.  
I listen for the bass and he's there.  
It's as if his heart is still beating somewhere,  
telling me he's still with me  
if I will only just listen.

Published in *Two Hawks Quarterly*, Spring 2022 issue

**Prediction**

**21 June 2020**

**after W.S. Merwin**

The world was supposed to end last Sunday  
but I completely forgot.  
I had planned to check if the sky looked strange  
or if the sun dimmed at midday  
as it sometimes does  
in my dreams.

My mother remembered many such predictions  
in her lifetime.  
I myself have lost count of those in my life.

Some of us try to push and bend the world  
to fit neatly into these prophecies.  
Or we push and bend the prophecies  
to fit the world.  
Especially those of Nostradamus.

Nostradamus.

His huge name thuds  
like a black door slamming shut.  
How can we not believe?

I hold a bit of my breath  
with each prediction  
wondering if this could be a correct one.  
In 1969 California was to sink into the sea,  
so I should know better.

But none of this matters  
since we will all have our own unique,  
personal end of the world.  
We are each a sealed envelope  
with an indelibly written date,  
a life-sized secret, somewhere within us:

the anniversary of our death  
that we pass every year without knowing.

On that day, we wake, we eat, we live.  
The sky watches us,  
patient and filled with God.  
Waiting.

(Cont)

(Cont)

Then the day is finished,  
forgotten like a turned page.  
It rides the earth's sad blue away from us  
but returns again and again  
never giving up.

Until finally it stands before us,  
its God-sized hands raised  
blocking our way  
and the world ends  
without a prediction.

Published in *London Grip*, July 2020

**DIANA HILLS**



Diana is a walker, grandmother, volunteer and many other things beside.

**Poems**  
222

## **Prayer for today**

The bot speaks  
How can I help you?  
Prayer for today  
though God's not listening  
I thirst for a voice  
comfort of my fleece  
in furious wind,  
A voice, clear as a lute,  
that can pierce  
the muffle in my ear  
Bot speaks  
still need help?  
My stick fingers  
plant words on  
the dead keyboard,  
drops of water  
on dry streams  
the words evaporate  
meaning blank  
Bot speaks  
Give me information  
How, why, what, when  
my brain searches  
its vast store of algorithms  
of hidden facts  
finds zero  
I type  
I want my PC to work  
Bot responds  
Look at the website  
it leaves  
no goodbye  
I might be dying  
but Bot won't care.  
I hunger for a voice,  
full of laughter, hope  
to explain, listen, understand  
just someone to tell me  
I'm still alive.

### **The model Mona Lisa**

I'm starting to get bored,  
I've stood in this freezing place for ten days  
and he's only painted one eye.  
Now he wants me to smile  
so to hurry him, I put on a little smirk  
which he tells me to repeat again and again.  
I begin to see the funny side,  
and tease him about my horrid teeth.  
Best not to paint them, I murmur,  
And he laughs, this strange and hairy man,  
who supposed to be some kind of genius.  
Keep your mouth still, he demands  
and look at me, gaze at me!  
I sigh, fold my arms, and think of lovely, rich Francesco.  
That's perfect he says,  
I reply I need to be excused,  
or I shall do something which is rather rude.  
He nods slowly, and I peak round at what he's done,  
half a mouth, what a waste of time, I think  
I'd rather be walking the dogs.

### **Covid Rainbows**

Covid rainbows with many hues, forms, creators,  
once loomed in darkened windows, faded doors,  
precarious, wobbling lines, shapes askew,  
circles of revolving emotions,  
plague emblems in technicolour.

Covid red was flamboyant scarlet,  
onset of fever, molten flares of pain,  
Covid orange, rusted, sticky, sickly,  
viscous fluid in a jagged throat,  
Covid yellow, stray dandelions,  
withered, bone weary, drooping,  
then most feared, lurid Covid green.  
battles to breathe in thick pollen clouds.

Covid blue, the colour of cornflowers,  
breath morphs to gentle, calm at last,  
The pink of Covid shells, pale, insipid,  
the taste of chocolate sawdust on the tongue,  
and the final, Covid purple,  
the prize of recovery, loveliest royal gift.

These humble rainbows  
are precious, lasting, true,  
colours of the plague  
but the colours too of gratitude  
to the countless brave souls  
who helped the world survive.

## FRANCESCA HUNT



Francesca is a retired Chemistry teacher living in mid-Wales, 30 miles west of Shrewsbury. She enjoys all forms of writing, but poetry is her *raison d'être*. She has had poems published online, in magazines and in anthologies. She has won competitions, been short-listed for a collection, and has now got her first collection, 'Coloured Truths', published at Lulu.Com, and also on Amazon.

### **Poems**

Maketh the Day, Maketh the Night

Mocking

Silence – the witch of perpetuity

### **Maketh the Day, Maketh the Night**

As sun closes the red curtains of day,  
night opens its blackened mystery,  
a silence punctuated by sheep-jaw grind.  
Owls dive with pin-prick accuracy  
as mice scurry under dusk's camouflage.

Listen to the song of night graves,  
as voices rise, spirits swirl to wind  
as darkness battles moonlight  
at St Mair's on Llanfair hill.  
Laughter and tears buried six-foot under –

hear gossip echoing off the granite.  
Who is with Thomas in Rose Cottage?  
What was Maggie Price doing in the vestry?  
When will Old Joe be served his papers?  
Will he make it up – or maybe a journey below?

Why was poor Johnny, taken too soon...  
it was the drink they say,  
those days of women and waste,  
spirits drunk between bingo with the missus  
on a Monday and Chapel on a Sunday.

The vicar says his prayers on arthritic knees,  
a slave to the wet cold of the valley,  
he climbs between warm sheets  
shutting the Lord's day, not knowing  
of His night, where life stirs for the other shift.

## **Mocking**

Don't look to me for guiding light,  
accept the gifts of each new day  
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

Eyes open wide with dawn despite  
Eve's mocking laugh of cruel betray.  
Don't look to me for guiding light.

She left my bed and stole my fight.  
She found another's heart to play  
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

Alone with hate, I have no sight  
and sink in tunnelling dismay.  
Don't, look to me for guiding light

to climb the hills and take delight  
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

I wake alone from sleep's respite,  
and yearn to catch a summer ray –  
don't look to me for guiding light.

See silent blood from sorrow's plight:  
her mocking's stopped. Too late to pray.  
Don't look to me, for guiding light  
as sun burns cold, from heat of night.

### **Silence – the witch of perpetuity**

John gave me a black walnut box  
cousin Ella will tell you more this evening  
apparently someone has become aware  
I am to be stolen from this island

You must stay and fight  
no act of gallantry or heroism  
be practical contribute  
It will be our happy fate

twenty six letter available  
to translate my feelings  
a curious stare then saucer-eye panic  
my suspicion was met with a smile

## LAUREN JARVIS



Lauren grew up in West Lothian with a view of the Five Sisters Bing. She now lives in East Renfrewshire. Her poetry touches on aspects of her early life in a village, teenage years in a new town and growing old in the Glasgow suburbs! For work and education, she lived for spells in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bristol, Liverpool and Lockhaven Pennsylvania. Her style is a mix of narrative and lyrical, and she enjoys experimenting with a variety of poetic forms.

### **Poems**

Empty Nest Blues  
the great global rat crisis of 2025  
Hail ate April

## **EMPTY NEST BLUES**

Old dog's dead, our girls all grown and moved on  
into new homes for their new selves leaving  
us their empty shelves! And the dog's dead! Gone!  
Vacant bedrooms! Our hearts sadly grieving.

Clean, empty under bed storage boxes!  
The girls-giggles long gone, a memory.  
We feed our garden robins and foxes  
we praise and cajole them for company.

But hey, camper van's fun to travel in  
and we get the house all to ourselves y-e-a-h!  
as if we are carefree and young again.  
Our shiny new van revs out our driveway

to the Highway – north, south, east, west and on  
cruising on-on-into-oblivion.

**The Guardian Mon 4 Aug 2025 - The Teeside mega-rat: a 22-inch rodent and the great global rat crisis of 2025 .**

little RAT

clearly a young un', carefree, long tailed, you brazenly  
scutter along the gutter; sunshine glints your fur,  
and beams through the translucent cartilage of your ear  
pink as this cherry blossomed boulevard

little RAT

have your folks not taught you yet to stay out our way!  
Beware the construction workers digging up the paths  
to lay their pipes; in a heartbeat they will spade  
you-dead, and that will be the end of you

little RAT

keep your distance, stay away from me! What if  
you scurry up my trouser leg! I don't want your  
rat fever or bubonic plague from long ago. I must  
now take a different path, find a different way to go

little RAT

if we are to share this well-fed sweet suburbia  
you must all stay hidden; furry and furtive in your  
hiding places; under decking, dens, nests and burrows  
we want you out of sight for our peace of mind

little RAT

yes, we know your kind are caged up in  
our labs, guinea pigs for our drug trials.  
A similar genome makeup, we do share  
but people don't care much about your welfare

little RAT

stay safe and stay out my way!

## HAIL LATE APRIL

Out of the blue  
jewel ice crystals  
cascade from a pink sky

and tumble into the trees'  
crevices, gnarly boughs  
and blossom buds.

Polar jumping beans  
turn the green pitch  
dove grey.

I pick the pert ice pellets  
between daisies, squeeze  
a tepid ice shape, the last

of the day's sun warms  
my hand, as its shine splinters  
through a coral-cloud. Three

crows in a row caw, then go.  
Three. Still. Swings.  
The playpark desolate.

In the shade and shelter,  
of long shadows from  
tall trees, I throw

twig sticks for the young dog  
bewildered he can't catch  
the sticks shadows

## SARAH KENT



Sarah Kent is a London-based homeopath, sound healer, folk fiddler, five rhythms dancer and grandmother. She has written poems all through her life in a very stop/start way. PK has helped her keep writing.

### **Poems**

What Three Words at Church of St Andrew, Holborn  
Sainsbury's  
An Easter Monday Visit

### **What Three Words at Church of St Andrew, Holborn**

Bishop Jonathan flicks the lights out  
surprises the choir on the church stage  
barefoot in his blue dressing gown  
tonight's cope and mitre

#### **//clown.dare.oppose**

deathglares the audience  
repeatedly wags a  
patriarch's index finger of blame

“this is a terrible racket  
it's gone past ten  
you're in my house  
can you leave it now please”

#### **//flat.notes.elder**

stunned silence some heckles  
as he shambles off stage  
aggression in his wake

choir and audience burst into  
Dancing Queen acapella  
the church rocks

#### **//escape.wink.edit**

#### **//watch.share.smiles**

the Bishop's apology makes Wikipedia  
the incident forever on his CV  
still Bishop of Fulham for now

#### **//retain.dusty.squad**

### **Sainsbury's**

our blue lights flash  
reflect in every window  
we speed past  
like a zipline through  
Kusama's Infinity Room  
at the Tate

we hurtle head on  
heart in my throat  
siren like a stun gun  
pauses oncoming traffic  
a split second before collision

and we're at Sainsbury's  
she's on a chair by the door  
white tiny bewildered  
glad to be found

we take her home  
in the police car  
lights and siren off  
on the couch again  
no memories of her great escape  
just chocolate chip cookies  
her hand in her husband's  
his shattered tears of relief

### **An Easter Monday Visit**

Mum is tinier each time I see her  
she has lost the word for daughter  
I interweave her icy fingers with mine  
stroke her claw-like thumbs

she has lost the word for daughter  
pansies like purple silk  
stroke her claw-like thumbs  
wild orchids bloom in the meadow

pansies like purple silk  
your hands are so warm  
wild orchids bloom in the meadow  
thankyou

your hands are so warm  
I close her fiddly fleece zip  
thankyou  
I waited a lifetime for the appreciation

I close her fiddly fleece zip  
I interweave her icy fingers with mine  
I waited a lifetime for the appreciation  
Mum is tinier each time I see her

## CORINNE LAWRENCE



Corinne lives in the South Manchester area of the UK. A specialist teacher of Speech and Drama for over thirty years, Corinne started writing seriously in 2010. Her first placing was as a runner-up in a *Writers' Forum* monthly competition and subsequently her work appeared on the *Visual Verse* website. She enjoys poetry writing courses and is currently being mentored by Jim Bennett. She is also a long-term member of a local writing group. Corinne has had poems published by **Impspired**, and **Indigo Dreams Publishing** in *Reach Poetry*, which also published *For The Silent* and *Voices For the Silent* – anthologies published in conjunction with The League Against Cruel Sports. Corinne is also a **Poetry Kit** poet as from 2020.

Several of Corinne's poems have been reviewed in *Writers' Forum* and *Writing Magazine*, and she has won, been placed and short listed in a number of competitions in both of these publications, and several times in *Reach Poetry's* 'Box' for the most popular poem/s of any given month . Corinne enjoys writing both formal and free verse and is especially fond of ekphrastic poetry.

### Poems

AI

Sehnsucht

The Feathered Flame

## AI

Makes sense of life's pixelled tapestry  
in an intricate reasoning dance.

The good: it reads my faulty audiological  
map, enables me to hear what you say.

I no longer need to lean forward to lip read,  
tilt my head in intense concentration.

The bad: it's a technology that can't,  
as yet, treat all users the same,  
although it can paint you a picture,  
compose music or write you a love poem.

But what are they worth – without  
the human touch, even if it's flawed.

The scary: it's unregulated, unfettered,  
not in a dystopian future, but the here and now.

Sehnsucht

(After *Cape Cod Morning* by Edward Hopper: 1950)

Morning light quickens  
on the red painted damp course,  
and white clapboard. Green blinds  
echo the trees, and the curtains  
team up with the sun.

Late summer sets fire to the air  
in a passion of auburn grasses,  
her scarlet shift, her flame red hair.

How long has she been there, motionless,  
leaning across the table, gripping  
its sides with taut arms and hands,  
her face tense, staring, staring,  
at odds with the backdrop she inhabits.

Heavy dressed trees sound-break traffic.  
Mouth set, resolute, she'll be sensitive  
to the first faint purr of car's engine,  
her breasts a thrusting challenge  
against yet another night's absence.

### The Feathered Flame\*

Zhivago: from the space between each word  
he sliced *to be or not to be* right through –  
a million plumes of thought, each a firebird

that yearned for freedom. At his desk he heard  
the howling wolves. They ruled the land. They knew  
Zhivago. From the space between each word

he siphoned insight, heart and reason. Spurred  
by nature's score he wrote – words that flew –  
a million plumes of thought – each a firebird

deflecting threats to muzzle him. Absurd  
to think the *Butcher Bird*\*\*could not see through  
Zhivago. From the space between each word

his great voice sang. It soared, undeterred  
by Gulag toughs, or agents to subdue  
those million plumes of thought, each a firebird –

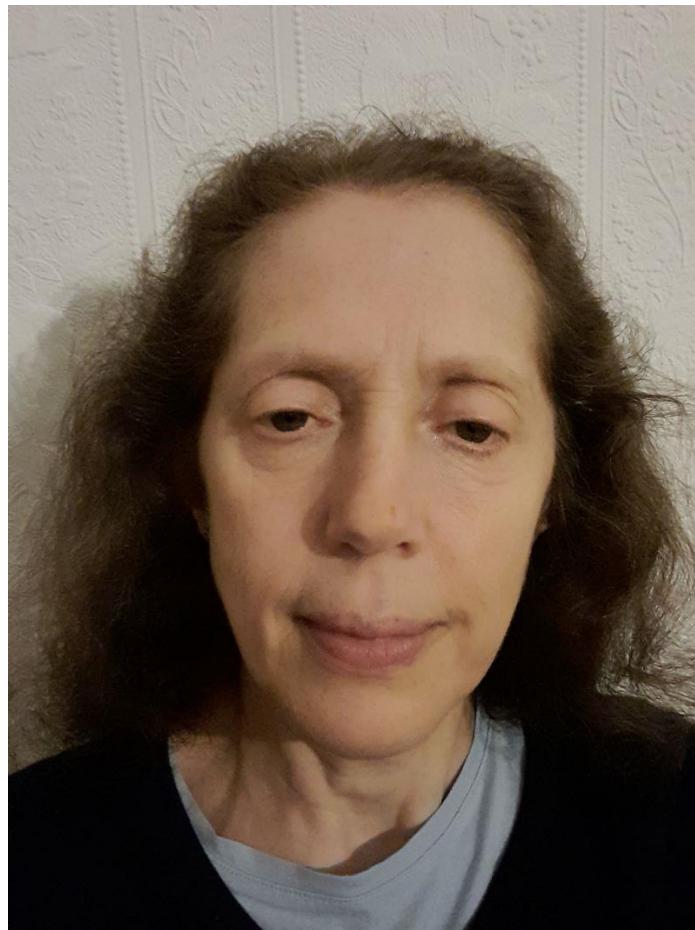
a covert revolution – people's watchword,  
and secret challenge to the despot view.

Zhivago: from the space between each word  
spring plumes of thought, each one a poet's firebird.

\*First published and reviewed as 'Pasternak and Zhivago' in Writing Magazine in May 2025.

\*\*Butcher Bird – Stalin. He is said to have crossed Pasternak's name off an execution list in 1937 reportedly declaring, "Do not touch this cloud dweller," or, in another translation, "Leave that holy fool alone!"

### JOY LEBOF



A child of the 60s, Joy was born and bred in London. Married, she has a son and a daughter. and is currently living in West Yorkshire. Her penname is Simcha Lebovitch.

A teaching assistant by training and of long experience, she began to write poetry as a vehicle to help her pupils with their understanding of phonics.

She has had poems published on Poetry Kit, in their publications, Lunch and On Course as well as in Poetry Super Highway's Holocaust editions and at times contributes to poetry threads on X.

She performs some of her poetry on her YouTube channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@simchalebovitch6944>

#### Poems

To Be a Woman  
Where Wolves Run  
Mourning (JZ2)

## To Be A Woman

So it's official  
J K Rowling's been right all along  
Biology confirms the definition  
defines a person's sex  
XX be truly she but is this always so

like those with AIS or Swyer syndrome  
or other genetics gone astray  
or those who've pulled out all the stops  
hormones counselling surgically reassigned  
What's to be their status

now gender bending males lack legal claim  
for access to female safe spaces  
where once frauds hounded real women  
with fear provoking rods of perversion  
no part of true lass matron lady  
though may be present in pantomime dames

and second rate males unable to compete  
with alphas at top of their game  
wrecked testosterone madness on the fairer sex  
Honour's been no impediment to their punch  
females battered broken and concussed  
death might have followed too  
had Justices not stopped this Woke madness

(Highly commended poem in the Poetry Kit Easter competition 2025)

## Where Wolves Run

we tread on hallowed ground  
untamed by human hand  
forest tundra grasslands  
desert swamp  
wild heights virgin valleys  
and anything in between  
where wolves rule the land  
survivors irrespective of clime  
though not of man's depredations  
where flocks flee their presence  
where ravens polish off their leavings  
where Harris's hawks hunt in packs  
but where when times are lean  
bears and tigers might see  
wolves a tough but tasty treat

(First appearing for #promptcombo #Wildlife for #WorldWildlifeDay @PaulDragonwolf1)

### **Mourning (JZ2)**

The sun rose crimson  
dripping with the blood of war  
of those that died as atom split

as devastation rained  
on city dwellers and beyond  
huddled at home or out  
seeking their daily bread  
colour drained by death's dread hand  
just monochrome and red  
remained reminder  
of their was

### MARTHA LANDMAN



Martha Landman writes in Adelaide, South Australia, on unceded Kaurna land. Her work appears in anthologies and journals in the UK, US, Australia, and South Africa. Her chapbook, *Between Us*, was published by Ginninderra Press, 2019. Her first single collection, *like scavenger birds*, was published by ICOE press, 2023.

Her poem *Girl From the Underground* was highly commended in the WA Poetry d'Amour contest in August 2024. Her poem *Pedestalled – Sir Samuel James Way* was shortlisted for the Robert Gray Prize in August 2025.

#### **Poems**

Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall

Photo Girl

Pedestalled - Sir Samuel James Way

### **Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall**

Today it's Allen Ginsberg.  
Bob calls him over, they talk Kerouac.  
Around them buskers cover a range  
from lonesomeness to love for all  
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.  
It's violin, banjo, and guitar,  
young ones singing *Hallelujah*.  
It's winter and an idiot wind  
howls through the alleys  
too early for the city lights to come on.

Bob shows Allen some chords,  
he plucks to the beat of the street  
and Allen makes him cry  
for the babies on Jessore Road.  
They sit there, tight, talk  
of when it was easy  
to tell wrong from right.  
*Has much changed?* Allen asks.  
*I'm another character*, says Bob.

They get up and walk, dropping  
a coin in a blind man's cup.  
Around them buskers cover a range  
from lonesomeness to love for all  
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.

(Published in *Friendly Street Poets Anthology*, 2022)

## **Photo Girl**

for eighteen maternal years  
mornings were wake-up calls

peanut butter sandwiches  
lost-sock hysteria, school runs

her violin out of tune  
maths homework undone

moods and music shared  
with dogs and cats on her bed

she raised herself  
on Bart-Simpson philosophy

‘I didn’t do it. Nobody saw me do it’  
and mining guilt money from her mother

she rode her bike along the river  
dark curls rioting underneath her helmet

my ‘turn that music down’  
echoing through the house

neural pathways laid, her art  
graffitied on cellar walls

curiosity queen, she spread her wings  
to a new world of university halls

(Published in *Antithesis Journal*, July 2022)

### **Pedestalled - Sir Samuel James Way**

*Here, hold still, let me scrub this mess—  
pigeon shit and traffic soot—your soul  
I can't cleanse. For that you see a priest.*

The girl cleaning the statue works at his back,  
toothbrush and cotton cloth in the folds of his neck.

*Where did you two meet? On the beach? In a pub?  
You, polished churchman, chief justice, Freemason.  
I'm not talking morals. Grandma does.  
Says I've got none. She'd call you a cavalier.*

He, in judicial wig and gown. She in fluorescent workwear,  
boots. Petite girl, red dreadlocks, pastiche of tenderness.

*A cruel thing—kept woman in Tassie:  
you the Adelaide socialite, she a former chambermaid.  
Long-distance love in secrecy for twenty years—  
no choice in those judgmental days?*

Up here the air is silent, serene. She's half-aware  
of North Terrace's swish-swash like ocean waves.

*You're not bad looking, you know, salt 'n pepper beard.  
They call you Sir, but Susannah was the saint. Cold  
in Van Diemen's Land waiting for you crossing  
Bass Strait each summer. Did she cry herself to sleep?*

Now she's at his front, polishes his pointed finger, his foot  
almost steps off the base. Adelaide's epitome of integrity.

*What a mess you were when she died at 40—  
she raised your kids, accepted her lot.  
Her grief's your grief. Loyalty from you both.  
Did you wear a hat from her millinery?*

From his pedestal Sir Samuel watches his properties—  
Montefiore, Kadlunga, his beloved Shropshire sheep.

*There, I've cleaned your eyes, the colour I can't see.  
Did you marry Katherine for love or for social grace,  
Adelaide at your feet? They say you were kind  
to the plight of women and children in court.  
And here you are, pigeons shitting on your gown.*

(Shortlisted for the Robert Gray Poetry Prize, August 2025)

**ANNE McCREA**



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Anne McCrea lives in North West Ireland. She writes poetry and prose. She has had poems published in The Honest Ulsterman, Channel, North West Words, Tales from the Moonlit Path, and the Seamus Heaney Anthology (Award for new writing 2025)

**Poems**

Cairo USA

Judith Hearne is Alive and Well

Reunion

## Cairo USA

like my home town  
at the confluence of rivers  
the Ohio and Mississippi  
I have a view of the river Foyle  
formed by the Mourne and the Finn

once high hopes were held  
for Cairo USA racial tensions  
got in the way Strabane  
was always worth standing up for  
the ú Néill and O' Donnell clans  
but now in a different peaceful way

in the seventies the young woman who  
was addressing a Civil Rights meeting  
told me I wouldn't understand The Struggle  
because I was too middle class  
I was wearing a black beret  
and a grey gaberdine coat  
with a maroon tartan collar

in Cairo USA Latinos bring  
custom to a newly opened  
restaurant a renaissance  
inclusivity buzzing vibrancy  
a beacon of hope  
and I'm watching the river flow.

### **Judith Hearne is Alive and Well**

on the corner of Camden street  
it was on one of these streets  
that my Victorian grandfather  
whose most usual saying  
was Bounce – and thirteen children  
separately or together bounced  
to attention – came to die in a nursing home  
he could not have known  
that years on  
his granddaughter would play  
super ball in the back yard  
and thinking of her grandfather  
bounce the ball high as a skylark  
while downtown  
Bobby Vee sang Rubber Ball

## Reunion

the clock has lost a limb  
it's broken waiting for the clock maker  
a wizardess who carries spares  
in her box of tricks

she arrives in an oil stained  
boiler suit and carrying a ladder  
on her shoulder (this woman works out)  
and whistling a tune

at the sound of spanners and wrenches  
the big hand is seen to move a millimetre  
imperceptibly the cogs ready  
themselves for some oil

as the clock begins to strike the hour  
the little man and woman  
shuffle in their shoes  
as they prepare to meet again  
after a century apart

## DAPHNE MILNE



Daphne Milne's work is published in print and online in magazines and anthologies internationally. She writes poems, short stories, flash fiction and novellas both in conventional and NIF format and has been longlisted for the Bath NIF competition. Daphne lived in Australia for five years where she was involved in the WA Emerging Writers programme and Perth Poetry Festival.

Co Editor Artemis 2024.

Nominated for the Forward Prize 2022.

Katharine Susannah Pritchard fellow 2021.

Poetry Kit Contemporary Poet 2020.

Pamphlets: The Blue Boob Club — Indigo Dreams 2019.

Dancing with Mr. Dapperman — Origami Press 2023

Behind Prim Suburban Walls — Vole Books 2025 — Winner Brian Dempsey Memorial Prize 2025.

### **Poems**

A Long Road

On growing up

Blue – Beyond Dreaming

### **A long road**

The fag end of a tiring day  
a long road on a dark night  
High wall edging the road  
vaguely threatening  
as is police car following me  
I am sober — driving well  
within speed limit  
Police car in mirror  
night becomes darker  
high wall seems closer  
street lights far apart  
mostly smashed  
police car closes in  
two shadowy silhouettes  
watching from the front seat  
At the town limits  
as the street lights stop  
the police car turns back  
towards the town  
Later I remember the sign  
on the wall — 'HM Prison...'

### **On growing up**

Once he grew up  
father never drank  
water only gin

straight gin— no ice  
no lemon no tonic — gin  
clean and clear and still

unlike river water  
sometimes clean or clear  
but always on the move

like Dad — only at home  
in some pub or bar  
well away from home

Living with an alcoholic  
is like walking on water  
precarious as hell

you have to hold  
your breath as if practising  
for swimming underwater

### **Blue — beyond dreaming**

Sapphire is almost as hard as a diamond and equally expensive. Although she dreams of deep, rich cobalt nights — summer nights as energetic and flexible as any athlete, she will never change. Sapphire is too languid for flexibility. Her dreams are deep, dark and distant, like a starlit sky. The earth, when seen from space, is blue, whatever the season. Clouds swirl at the sea's ending and the colour of summer is ultramarine. True ultramarine, from crushed lapis lazuli, is the most expensive paint colour of all. Sometimes called Marian blue it is used for this reason. Virtue comes at a price. Only the ancient monks, illuminating their dreaming, dreamy Virgins, could rely on the necessity, the essential 'rightness' of ultramarine, its value. All their dreams were of serving God.

## ANNE SHEPPARD



Anne Sheppard, born in Nottinghamshire has lived in Gloucestershire for over 50 years. She has been writing poetry since childhood and has been published in several magazines including Orbis, Sentinel, Reach and Writing Magazine as well as in various anthologies. She belongs to several poetry and writing groups and also writes fiction. Her book The Purple Hare's Guide to Inspirational Writing can be purchased in The Henge Shop, Avebury, and at The Hollow Hills Bookshop in Glastonbury as well as directly. Her other interests include her family and grandchildren, spirituality, dowsing, gardening, reading and visiting places of interest.

### **Poems**

We Walked in Golden Conversation  
Tomorrow I will Grieve for my Country  
The Seagul

## We Walked in Golden Conversation

About a mile we walked,  
In golden conversation,  
Not thinking - stepping out,  
Glad to be free at last from  
Winter's restraints.  
We shivered all the same  
As we stopped to look over  
The crouched mess of a hedge  
At the valley spread out below us -  
Where a silver ribbon of river snaked  
Its way purposefully towards the estuary  
And the seabirds gathered there.  
He turned then, but I kept my eyes  
On the view before me.  
"Will you return?" he asked.  
Moisture filled my eyes, the wind  
Suddenly sharp. I blinked away  
Tears that threatened to betray  
The truth, and turned to walk back  
The way we had come.  
"Not yet," I said.

*Published in Reach Magazine No 310 – Jan 2025*

### **Tomorrow I will Grieve for my Country**

—  
Last month I laid out the suit  
That my son would wear for his wedding,  
I brushed it and hung it up,  
Admiring the quality of the cloth.  
He had worked hard and paid  
Good money to buy the best.

Last week I folded the suit  
Into a leather suitcase, that I hid  
Under old rags behind the boiler  
In my brother's outhouse.  
The Russians had arrived and I  
Wanted to keep it safe.

Yesterday I buried the suit  
Along with the remains of my son,  
Who fought for us all - his family,  
His bride to be, his future and ours.  
I remembered with tears - his birth, his smile,  
His last loving embrace.

Today I grieve for my son,  
Tomorrow I will grieve for my country,  
I will not be alone.

## The Seagull

The seagull cast his prehistoric eye  
upon the feast beneath,

Wheeled round and landed squarely  
on the bench's back,

His large pink feet with claws protruding,  
sharp and hooked,

He cocked his head, his eye dilating  
as he summed them up.

The woman flapped her hands,  
"go go, shoo shoo!"

The man beside her waved his hat,  
the prehistoric eye stared back.

The seagull jumped onto the seat,  
and lunged his head towards them,

He opened wide his yellow beak  
and uttered forth a warning.

B4dc

Alarmed and worried by his stance  
they shuffled back along the bench,

Without a thought she threw a chip,  
the seagull seized it roughly.

"He knew you would" the man rebuked her,  
So in a fit of pique, she threw another.

The seagull with the prehistoric eye looked up  
as others flew in overhead,

The couple screamed and threw the lot,  
as the feathered army landed.

## WENDY WEBB



**Wendy Webb** loves nature, wildlife, symmetry and form and the creative spark. Published in Reach, Sarasvati, Quantum Leap, Crystal, Dreich, Seventh Quarry, The Journal, The Frogmore Papers, Acumen, Drawn to the Light; online in Littoral, Lothlorien, Autumn Voices, Wildfire Words, Atlantean, Poetry Kit, Amateur Gardening, Leicester Literary Journal, Drawn to the Light, Poetry Wivenhoe, Seagulls (Canada), forthcoming: Poetry Breakfast; broadcast Poetry Place. Book: Love's Floreloquence; Landscapes (with David Norris-Kay) from Amazon; free downloads of other poetry from Obooko.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Loves-Floreloquence-Wendy-Ann-Webb/dp/B0C9SFNQMM/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?qid=2UMDIM5CGJAIL&keywords=Love%27s+Floreloquence%2CWendy+Ann+Webb&qid=1688758875&s=books&sprefix=love%27s+fl](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Loves-Floreloquence-Wendy-Ann-Webb/dp/B0C9SFNQMM/ref=sr_1_2?qid=2UMDIM5CGJAIL&keywords=Love%27s+Floreloquence%2CWendy+Ann+Webb&qid=1688758875&s=books&sprefix=love%27s+fl)

### Poems

ACCENTS ON GARDENING DUTIES

WHITE SILK, RED HOSE, GREY SHADE (1833, Ekphrastic)

GRIMM VAUDEVILLE PLAYS CHICKEN AND LACE

## ACCENTS ON GARDENING DUTIES

Gently sip gin miniature from Dunster Beach  
minus tonic in a hotel room,  
read of a journalist hauled over the coals of bad press:  
hope recovered in disastrous lives of the hundred.

Joints ache a garden's unwilding  
of giant buddleias, blackberry, briars  
and rosebay willow herb.

Brummie accent fluctuates from Lickey Grange,  
takes a heaving wheelie bin around  
Corrie streets of childhood.  
Kid sister spreads broad East Anglian skies  
buffed by guttural Northern lace finale, me duck.

Effervescent bar staff greet like distant cousins  
fresh from early shift at Tesco's.  
Soft-spoken Suffolk lad changes St John's uniform  
for family man duties,  
children dialect-free by speech therapists.

Gin softens the parts spiced at the Curry House  
for dreams of wasps, wild seeds and nettles.  
A robin perches on an ancient bird bath.

Refresher caffeine rush  
with a morning shower of muscle memory.  
Tones of Ilkley Moor or Grace Darling,  
*bootiful* Turkey or Devon cream teas  
jostle for stories of bravery or love.

Home for G&T and a rest  
as Dad's rumbling combo and broad Enderby  
(or Kilby Bridge) roll past to night.

**WHITE SILK, RED HOSE, GREY SHADE (1833, Ekphrastic)**

*[The Execution of Lady Jane Grey by Paul De la Roche]*

It is striking, in that corridor between the worlds,  
where my brief life is framed to shame the innocent.  
What's it worth? 17 short-changed protected years  
tripping between home and dying power.  
I wept when Catherine died in childbirth,  
she deserved better and, almost...

*I am condemned.*  
What to wear? Dark colours, no.  
Let them see my flesh pale as silk.  
The maid's keening loudly into my handkerchief,  
gloves will warm her, later.

My darling Guildford, I saw his neck, so kissable,  
at least it was a clean cut, thank God.  
I thought we had more time,  
Mary seemed to understand. For a while.

They let me tie the cloth myself,  
claustrophobic, hard to breathe,  
damp faint. Where is...  
*Will you take it off before I lay down?*  
My grandmother, Mary, should be proud  
as I kneel and bow,  
*I wash my hands in innocence.*

*What shall I do? Where is it?*  
Thank God for Brydges, found it.  
Paid that Grim Reaper,  
forgave him, of course.  
*Dispatch me quickly.*  
Just 9 days, or 13, since poor Edward...  
I follow my cousin. And, they...?

This straw is harsh,  
ah, that's my doorway to heaven,  
they frame me with this block.  
*I commend my spirit*  
breathe in....

## GRIMM VAUDEVILLE PLAYS CHICKEN AND LACE

This tale is Grimm, set in the historic town of Snotting:  
thank Robin for maids and lace! (Origins renamed).  
My father, born beside Kilby Bridge on the Grand Union Canal  
where he swore he learnt to swim (unsupervised), aged seven.  
Moving to settle at Enderby, his lifetime stash of coppers  
vanished (small bedroom, behind the pipes, undisturbed).  
His mother plucked chickens on Christmas Eve, pulling out  
their innards; blind man used to wringing birds' necks.  
Aged 14, left school. Worked his father's land, played  
Cowboys and Indians on the horse and dray. Sent down  
the mines (Bevin Boy) when War broke out. Village lad,  
he played truant, signed up in the Army (aged 18).  
He learnt to cook for the Officers' Mess, wrote love poems  
to his cousin. Home on leave – twice - he married, lived  
to regret his father's words: '*Never darken my doors again  
if you marry her!*' Unrepentant at leaving home – for lace.  
Three children – and two Council homes later – unlucky 13;  
divorced and dutiful; the Railway Guard worked shifts,  
saved for holidays, praised the Railway Orphanage  
for sanctuary – 2 out of 3 children safe – older daughter,  
oh yes, 13, settled with his Second Cousin (also,  
his Auntie-in-Law). Swingin' Sixties, baby at 16.  
Son sent to the Blind School, Birmingham. He settled.  
Youngest – by seven years – required speech therapy,  
learnt to speak/read/swim and became a poet;  
eldest: 3 children (different fathers); grandchildren,  
died too soon. Son married, bought own home,  
retrained in computers; ukuleles and canal-walks  
as retirement hobbies (inherited blindness, no children).  
Historically (by Family Tree)? Vaudeville players.